

Meditatio Talks

SERIES C 2006

Jul – Sep

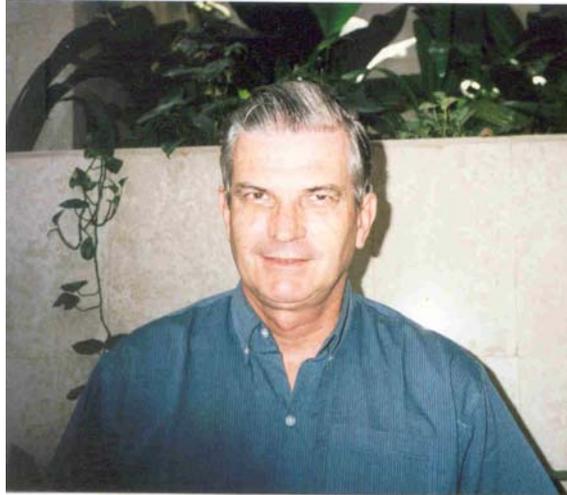
The Prayer that Jesus Taught

FR GERRY PIERSE CSsR

Talks given in Singapore and the Philippines

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FR GERRY PIERSE (1940-1999) was a Redemptorist priest who came from County Kerry in Ireland. He went to the Philippines in 1961 as a seminarian at the age of 21 and was ordained there in 1964. In the early years of his ministry, he served mainly in the rural missions. Later he was parish priest in three Redemptorist city parishes before he became prefect of the major seminary.

In later years, he specialised in giving retreats. This apostolate coincided with his moving deeper into contemplative prayer. He was greatly inspired by the teaching of Benedictine monk John Main, a fellow Irishman. From his own experience in the practice of Christian Meditation, he formed and led meditation groups in his parishes and in the provincial prison.

Gerry Pierse had a gift with words that made his teaching always simple, clear and effective. In a short period of time, he produced five books to help others tread and persevere on the path of Christian Meditation. When he gave talks on meditation, he had the extraordinary gift of illuminating the teaching with engaging stories, amusing anecdotes, and self-deprecating humour. The meditation communities in the Philippines, Ireland, Singapore, Australia, Malaysia and Mauritius benefited greatly from his teaching. This series of the *Meditatio Talks* is compiled from recordings of his talks to meditation groups in those regions.

Gerry Pierse died on 12 July 1999 from a swimming accident in Queensland, Australia. His body was found on the rocks of the Gold Coast. There is something that inspires awe in the way he returned to the Lord. For Gerry, the Sea and the Rock was home. The sea and the rocks were the place where the Celtic monks of old found silence and God. This was particularly true of those living near Skelligs in the South of Kerry. We pray that he rests now with God, his Rock and his strength.

21. The Present Moment

1 There are precious moments in all of our lives. In fact, as we look at our lives we see that the great moments are the ones that just happened by themselves, or maybe were even forced upon us. Most of our great plans and projects, on the other hand, may really never have come to.

2 The Gospels are full of such moments. One of the greatest, to my mind, was that of Simon of Cyrene who was forced to carry the cross of Jesus. It was just an ordinary day for him. He was going into town. He was not a “religious” man. He met a crucifixion procession and did not want to have anything to do with it. He was dragged in unwillingly. But he took up the cross and carried it. He was one of the few people who helped Jesus that day and will be remembered forever because of it.

3 Christ did not want to carry the cross either. “Father,” he said, “if it is possible take this cup away from me yet not what I want but what you want..” Yet he accepted the cross that was given to him. It was not a way of salvation that he had fashioned for himself. Yet, it was this uncontrived act that brought about our salvation.

4 We, too, are often absorbed in our plans, even plans for God’s Kingdom. We get so annoyed with the interruptions and unscheduled happenings. We waste so much energy in grumbling about the opportunity and lack of consideration of others. Yet, God’s Kingdom is in these moments.

5 On the road to Calvary, Jesus took time out to console the women and he gave assurance to the good thief on the cross. Even at these times of terrible personal stress he was able to take the focus of attention off himself and be concerned for others.

6 He turned the chance meeting with the woman at the well – when he was just making a short-cut through Samaria – into an encounter of grace. He rewarded with a miracle of healing the tenacious faith of the men who let the cripple down through the roof during his grand sermon.

7 In the Old Testament also, we find many figures who had greatness thrust upon them. Jonas, Job and Jeremiah were all people who did not want to be where the Lord placed them, but responded willingly enough to the inconvenient call.

8 There is a story about a man who went to the guru and asked how he could become holy. The guru told him to practise seeing God in all things. He went on his way through a narrow forest path and met an elephant. The little boy riding the elephant shouted to him to get out of the way. But he reasoned like this: “God is in the elephant. God is in me. God cannot hurt God. So I will just continue.” And so he did, in spite of the warnings of the little boy. When the elephant got close he took the man up in his trunk and flung him into the forest out of the way. The man went back to the guru full of complaints. He said that he had tried to follow the guru’s instructions and this was the result. “But you did not follow my instructions,” said the guru, “God was also in the little boy.”

9 We miss the presence of God so easily. We get so impatient with interruptions, with troublesome phone-calls; that beggar that turns up at the worst time, that companion who wants to pour out his or her problem when we just about have had enough, that companion

who needles us and who needs us to just be for him or her right now. We will miss these moments again and again if we cannot just *be*. Just be where we are, right now. These may not be “religious” moments – they may be moments that make us feel like cursing – but these are the moments of Christ. These are moments when we are called to take the focus off ourselves and to be totally for others.

10 We often talk about when things get back to normal. But that time never comes. The “abnormal” is normal; it is the time of Christ. *Now* is the time of salvation.

11 How can we train ourselves to be present to the present moment, to the moment of Christ? I know of no better way than the discipline of the twice daily saying of the mantra.

22. Restored To Our True Selves

1 Psychologists tell us that everybody struggles with a low self-image at some level. The values and approval of people around us affect us more than the values within us. From earliest childhood, children are manipulated to conform because of shame. This often means that a price has to be paid for love. So often the child is told that it will get a reward if it is good, or if it achieves well. Its self-worth is pegged to its achievements. It's being, of itself, has no value.

2 From the earliest age children are subjected to stroking exercises. We have graduation from kindergarten on. Everyone has to get some kind of recognition. We do our best to develop sensitive, greedy egos.

3 As a consequence, children grow up very sensitive and competitive. The words and looks and even the imagined thoughts of others control them. One of the high values of the culture is smooth interpersonal relationships. So, people hide feelings, and pay a big price because these feelings are often converted into psychosomatic illness, like high-blood pressure, asthma, allergy, ulcers. People may be psychologically mangled but cannot express it. They carry with them the hurts of their past life. They are still shrivelled up inside because of the way they had been treated by someone who may be, at this time, already dead. Death destroys a life but not the relationship. So, people compete with one another in all sorts of extraordinary ways. To live means to appear better than others. What we really are, to *be*, is of no importance.

4 To have a low self-image is to be a slave to the opinions of others and to put our destinies in the hands of those who have hurt us in the past. "If I had been given a good education ... If I had been loved as much as my sister was... If I had a college degree.... IF, IF, IF... then I would be happy." These "ifs" run through our lives. They make us slaves of the past, of our sins and the real or imagined sins of others towards us.

5 It is rightly said: "To err is human; to forgive divine." All human relationships are fraught with error and hurt. These hurts alienate us from ourselves, from our centres. We do not want to be at our centres because we feel that there is nothing lovable there. We are like doughnuts – there is something running around outside but there is no centre. Yet that centre is where our deepest being and beauty is. This is where Christ is; this is where God is. This is where the one who will enable us to forgive and to be alive again is.

6 We need to be restored to our own centres – to be able to enter there, to *be* there, to experience that it is an okay place to be. When we are there, the healing presence of Christ will enable us to forgive.

7 When we say the mantra, we are there. We cannot continue to pray the mantra and be a victim of anger and hatred, and of all the people in the past who have hurt us and destroyed our self-image.

8 One of our meditators shared about it in this way. "When I first tried to meditate, I found myself wanting to run away," he said. "Then I realized that when I tried to meditate,

my dis-ease came from the fact that I hated my neighbour. I fought this and said that I would try to see Christ in my neighbour. That was mission impossible! My neighbour cheated and stole and used the vilest language about me. Christ would never have done that. I continued to meditate putting aside the fidgeting and the distractions. Then it seemed as if Christ from within said to me one day, "I am within you. Look at your neighbour with my eyes." I have tried to do that and since then I now find myself a more free person. I can see and have compassion for the life history that crippled that neighbour. I even want to reach out and help."

23. Wholesome Relationships

1 A few years ago, Time Magazine had a cover story on stress. It showed how this was a major problem in the world today. It listed the many causes of stress – loss of joy, moving residence, etc. But then it told of one man who had all the causes. He had lost his job and changed his house six times in six years. Yet, he showed little signs of stress. When asked why, he answered: “Maybe it is because I have a good wife and I go to church on Sunday.”

2 “Internal empowerment” is an in-word at the present time. What empowers people, energizes them? What makes them alive? “I have a good wife and I go to church on Sundays” seems to be the key. Relationships. The person who has healthy and wholesome relationships seems to have more joy and energy and resilience in dealing with life’s ups and downs.

3 We all have four main relationships: our relationship to ourselves, to others, to the world and to God. We tend to act the same way in all of these four dimensions of relationship. If we are critical or resentful towards others we will tend to be critical and resentful also towards God. We will also have a hard time in accepting ourselves. When Jesus says, “I have come that you may have life, life in all its fullness” (Jn 10:10), I think that he wanted to improve all of these relationships. In another place he tells us that “the truth will make you free” (Jn 8:32). We need to have a passion for the truth if we are to be energized by the Lord. The passion for the truth means that we need to face up to reality with honesty and humour. Freedom comes from facing up to reality, from accepting gracefully what is inevitable.

4 Most of our “unfreedoms” come from refusing to accept things just as they are. We have great plans for God; we know exactly what he should do, and he does not to it. And so we are frustrated that he has not become our servant. We know exactly what our neighbours should do, but our neighbour does not do it. We let this affect our moods and send our blood pressure soaring. We have great expectations of ourselves. We day-dream ourselves into all kinds of successes that never happen, and are disgusted with ourselves as a result. So, myself, and others and God all become very disappointing.

5 We will probably express the disappointment with others and cover up our disappointment with ourselves and God in different kinds of frenetic activity. We get out of relationship with ourselves because we do not find ourselves a nice place to be.

6 But inside ourselves is a nice place to be. When we learn to be still, within ourselves, with others, and with God, wonderful things happen. As we are still with ourselves, the emotions that were clogged up at the doors of our hearts seem to be able to move in and out more freely. When we find that it is just okay to be within ourselves, we find that we can go deeper into our own resources.

7 Relationships with others also demand stillness – the ability to be with another without an agenda, without a purpose, just to enjoy being together. This is something that is getting more difficult in today’s busy world. Yet there cannot be relationships without wasting time together.

8 And then we must be still if we are to “know that I am God.” (Ps 46). It is in stillness that we realize relatedness with God, that we are his creatures.

9 Stillness enables us to accept reality with honesty and humour. Humour is the ability to see the twist, the unexpected angle in a situation and to be able to enjoy it. Humour does not necessarily mean boisterous laughter but the “chuckle in the gut”, the joy of living that comes from being at home within yourself. Meditation brings this kind of joy. Where this joy is, there is also an abundance of energy. Meditation can be the gateway into fullness of life. Once we relate to the Lord in stillness, we will find that all of our relationships will begin to improve.

24. Becoming Less Bogus

1 Evidence has been found that the founder of a prestigious world-wide Catholic lay movement organised, during his own life-time, the process for his own canonization after his death. Sometimes we hear of apparently good priests who are discovered to be leading double lives. I know of a reputable doctor who, when he went out of town to give a lecture, arranged with his secretary to call him twice during his speech, so that the audience would be impressed with his importance. We are always shocked when we discover the bogus, the phoney, the plastic.

2 But then one day we tumble to the bogus in ourselves!

3 Perhaps one of the greatest burdens that we have to carry in life is the image people have of us. It creates expectations and if we are not careful, we can become slaves to these expectations. One of the most dangerous “images” is that of “being holy”. We can be forced to live out of that image, that holiness, and become a slave to it. That is why religion that is too much on the surface is seldom deep. Holiness and an over easy appeal to discernment and the “will of God” can be a way of escaping the relationship with God found in everyday life and human situations. It can be bogus.

4 The world may be divided into two classes of people – the bad “bad people” and the good “bad people”. The bad bad people would be those like the younger son in the story of the forgiving father in Luke 15. He knew he was bad and had no problem in admitting it. The good bad people, would be similar to the older son, obedient, respectful, but resentful and lacking in compassion – a bogus person. Here are two surprises. Firstly, the Lord had much more time and compassion for the bad bads than for the good bads. Secondly, the people who come to meditation groups are much more likely to be good bad people than bad bad people!

5 I know from personal experience that a lot of the depression experienced by religious people springs from jealousy. Jealousy is an insidious vice that is very hard to admit, especially by one who is known to be holy or in a state of holiness. I remember a teacher telling me once that he taught many people how to play the guitar but none of them excelled; he always kept something back, because he feared to have a rival to his own prowess as the best player in the establishment.

6 Each of us has some quality that we seek compulsively – being right, helpful, successful, special, wise, loyal, fun-loving, strong or calm. If my self-esteem depends on my being wise or right or successful – or holy – I have a vested interest in your being dumb or wrong or a failure – or being sinful. As we grow up we learn that it is not socially acceptable to show ourselves for what we are in the raw, so we do it subtly. We do or say one thing when our meaning or purpose may be quite contrary. We become bogus.

7 Now the mantra is the great diagnoser and the great cure for the bogus within us. As we say the Mantra we are learning to sit at our own centre where Christ is. He is the Spirit of truth, the truth that sets us free. In his light, the bogus very quickly stands out. At first it makes us very uncomfortable. We want to stop meditation and to run away from the truth and the light. But if we stick with the mantra, the ego is gradually unhooked. We can face the truth about ourselves and that truth will set us free.

8 There is a story about a man who had a bad stutter. He never remembered when he had spoken a straight sentence. One day he found himself on a bus without any money. Stuck for a way to solve his predicament, he decided to exaggerate his stutter when the conductor came, in the hope that he would pass him by in exasperation. To his own amazement the stutterer spoke his first straight sentence when the conductor came to him. For the first time in his life he had accepted his stutter and the acceptance had freed him from it.

9 As we meditate, we will more and more discover the bogus in ourselves, the venality, the dishonesty, the lustfulness that we are still capable of in spite of the holy image that we may project before others. As we say the mantra, we will become more free to accept the darker side of ourselves, and once he have accepted it, it loses control over us. We become more integrated and less bogus.



25. Coming To Maturity

1 What is maturity? One description of it is to have consistency between the physical, social and transcendent parts of our human make up.

2 We are acting maturely when there is consistency between the three levels within us. It is desirable and necessary for our growth that we enjoy the physical. Our bodies can and should be sources of pleasure to us. Seeing, eating, touching, smelling, hearing, sports, the exercise of our sexuality are given to us for enjoyment. But the enjoyment is mature only when it is consistent with our values. This will vary from person to person. What might be quite mature and consistent with values for a married couple may be immature or destructive for someone who is not married. The eating and drinking that is mature for the ordinary person might be quite immature for the alcoholic or diabetic.

3 Social interaction with the same and the opposite sex is also something that can and should be enjoyed. However, when this interaction transgresses values it is no longer mature. When we dominate, exploit, degrade, manipulate or seduce others, we have eliminated the transcendent dimension. The human person is also capable of thinking and judging. The person can reach out to friendships that are mutually beneficial or even to benevolence and disinterested love. The values of honesty, justice, chastity can enable the human person to rise above his or her self.

4 It is of some value to know where we stand in the matter of maturity. One of the simplest tests for finding this out is to look at our prayer life. If, when you try to pray, you are blocked or constantly distracted by physical concerns (food, sex, comfort, wealth) then you may be fixated at the physical level. If, on the other hand, the block or the preoccupation is with your social relationships and your hurts and dependencies on others, it is likely that you are fixated on the social. But if you are more concerned with the presence of the Lord and bringing the needs of others and of the world into that presence, it is probable that the transcendent is predominating in your life. Meditating, praying the mantra, is a way of transcending all fixation and of becoming detached day by day from the compulsive behaviour that it causes.

5 What causes fixation, the inability to transcend? Generally a childhood experience of deprivation. Bodily deprivation, deprivation of food and warmth and of objects considered important may cause the development of the acquisitive fixations. Deprivation of physical warmth and cuddling may cause a fixation about physical touch or sexuality. Not being appreciated, affirmed, loved may cause a craving for social approval in its myriad forms. Cravings carry with them the fear of not acquiring the object craved for. Our deprivations – and all of us have them – lead to self-centredness, ego-centredness, and the inability to transcend self.

6 Psychology and psychotherapy offer many solutions. They sometimes help and sometimes fail. The simple saying of the mantra is, in my experience and in the Christian tradition, a time tested means of detaching the ego from the self, and so of setting one free to become transcendent.

26. Patience

1 The heart of the Gospel is love, a love that is shown by service. Jesus said: “I have come, not to be served, but to serve.” The great obstacle to loving service is impatience. The great remedy for impatience is silence and the persistent saying of the mantra.

2 Some of the great attitudes of love are:

“I will hear your story so that I can know who you are,”

“I will help you give birth to yourself,”

“I will be for you whatever you need me to be.”

3 Yet it is so often difficult to listen to another’s story. We want to jump ahead or fix it right away; to tell the other – whether the other be a person or a group or a community – what he or she or they should do or should have done. In this way we block rather than hasten the birth of the other. If we truly love we will have patience. We will let ourselves appear stupid to those who would be threatened by our wisdom. We will appear to have forgotten to those who do not need to be reminded of what they are not ready to recall. We will be in no hurry for those whose utterances are punctuated by long periods of silence. We will be open beside those who pour out their hearts like a dam that is bursting.

4 We will accept abuse knowing that it is displaced. The anger we hear hitting us is often anger directed to some unidentified target in the past. If we love, we take the anger, and when we have taken it, pressure is released. Thus, the other may be able to feel God’s love through our loving.

5 The core of ministry is story-listening. This is being able to listen to others talk about their pain. Stories start the minister off where the person or the people are. The great paradigm of this kind of ministry is the Melon Story.

6 “There was a land in which the people believed that a melon was a monster. When they discovered one while harvesting or hunting they skirted it in fear. A son of that land went to a high-class university and, of course, learned that a melon was not a monster. When he returned home on vacation he joined his relatives in reaping the harvest. The cry “monster” was heard and everyone ran except for the learned one from the university. He laughed and walked up to the melon. He picked it up, slashed it into slices and began to eat it. He walked back to the people full of satisfaction with his performance. But he was amazed, for now they were running from him. They were saying, “If he can do that to the monster, what a monster he himself must have become.”

7 Later, another son of that place went to a less distinguished seat of learning. There he also learned that a melon was not a monster. When he returned he too went harvesting with the others. When the cry “monster” was heard, he forgot all about what he had learned and ran with the others. Then he began to remember slowly what he had learned and asked, “Why are we running?” He was told, “From the melon monster, of course!” He then asked, “How do we know that the melon is a monster?” After hours of trying, nobody could give a satisfactory answer. So they were willing to take another look at the “monster”. They looked at it from afar, then they prodded it with a long bamboo, eventually they touched it, sliced it and ate it.

8 It was a slow process, a patient process, a process that went with the pace of the people. It was a process that eventually worked.

9 The great obstacle to this process is impatience: we have other things to do; this person is too demanding; these people are stupid; they lack education or they lack faith; I have heard it all before and to no avail. This obstacle cannot be removed by steeling our wills and saying, "I will make myself sit and listen". Because then we find our legs walking away before we realize it, or our thoughts wandering to the place where we would prefer to be.

10 We find the process of patient active listening difficult because of the impatience that is within ourselves. In meditation we experience this very impatience. Saying the mantra is such a simple matter and yet we fail. Impatience tends to make us respond with violence or abandonment. We tend to try to grasp the mantra by an act of the will and hold it in place no matter what. But distractions come, and like a slippery eel, the mantra slips out of our grasp. As we repeat the process, our anger and impatience may build up. Then we may decide to abandon the Mantra altogether. That is the final impatience.

11 Or we can be patient and persistent. We can lay the mantra back on our consciousness with the gentleness of returning a phonograph needle on to a record. We do this with perseverance, with persistence, but never with impatience. As we do this, we reconcile two opposite poles within ourselves.

12 Then we find that, without noticing it, this reconciliation of opposites, this patience and persistence, overflows into our ministry. Our silence has disposed us for effective service and ministry.

27. Accepting Others

1 In the meditation groups that I have been associated with, the question always comes up at the beginning: Why should I be with these people? We have nothing in common socially, economically or in temperament? They will not understand my problems.

2 After a few months of praying the Mantra, these questions cease to bother anyone anymore. A bond is formed, a maturation takes place, and the expectation about solving problem changes.

3 Experience shows how unifying silence is. If a director and directee can spend time in silence together before a Spiritual Direction Session it gives a new richness to the sharing. So too if religious in their community, can spend time together in silence before a meeting, there is a greater chance that the meeting will be fruitful. When Pope John Paul II invited leaders of the world religions to meet at Assisi the only certainly unifying prayer that they could use was silence.

4 This matter of community is essential for all of us whether we are in religious communities, in families, or in place of work. From time to time we will come across people – often very good people – who will get under our skins, make us angry or bring out the worst in us. The writer G. K. Chesterton once said that families are commonly held to be havens of love in oceans of hate. The opposite, he said, is often true. Families are havens of hate in an ocean of bogus love. When we are with outsiders, we can maintain pretences of peace. But in the close community of the family, or work-place, or the religious house, that is not always possible.

5 Most of our problems in living together spring from our own Egos. Consciously or unconsciously there is a program within us of how others should act and particularly how they should act towards us. For example, in the prayers in my religious community, we sometimes say the verses of the Psalms one after another. I remember feeling very angry one morning when someone led the prayers in an anti-clockwise rather than a clock-wise direction. Why not? Apart from my inbuilt programming?

6 When we let go of our own need to dominate and manipulate, we become more tolerant of the other. Tolerance will quickly yield to acceptance of the other and the right of the other to be different. This acceptance may yield to affirmation and the realisation that the other's 'being different' is something complementary and, if acknowledged, can be an enrichment to us.

7 This is the first apostolate for all of us. Learning to be at least tolerant, if not accepting and affirming, of those who irritate or hurt us, especially those who are around us all the time. Without this attitude, "option for the poor" and commitment to the people "out there" is just a pious dream or a form of escapism.

8 The wisdom of the East has always held that one cannot be silent and angry at the same time. In silence, the psyche is enabled to cast off what is poisonous to it. As still water

lets straw float to the surface and heavier material sink, so too we become clearer and unclogged, freed from anger, as we enter into silence.

9 The discipline of the Mantra and the silence towards which it brings us is a discipline which makes us hold on in love in spite of our tensions. When the storm passes over, calm is restored. The twice daily saying of the Mantra establishes this calm as habitual, and with it brings great benefits to both body and soul.

10 It is from the stillness within that we most effectively and lovingly reach out to others and to the other. The human person is like a bowl, if it is full of anger and hate it can only give out anger and hate. If it is full of love it can only give love. As the Mantra brings us to stillness it brings us to love. When we are still within, we can be with ourselves in tolerance and love. When we can be with ourselves in tolerance and love we can also be with others in the same way.

11 Prayer groups begin with persons. The group comes together because of the attraction or reputation of the leader or because friends invite one another. This is a very normal way of coming into discipleship. But as time goes on, persons fade and the Person becomes important. As the prayer group develops, the person of Christ rather than any human person becomes the center and the attraction. When we realize that He is the center, he whose Spirit is the enabler of forgiveness, all other persons, no matter how superficially repulsive, fit into the family of love.

28. Listening

1 A little boy and his mother were in town for the day. They went into a restaurant for a snack. When the waiter came along, the mother began to order. But the waiter noticed that the little boy wanted to say something.

2 “Let the little man tell us himself what he wants,” said the waiter. “I’ll have a hamburger,” said the little boy. When the waiter went off to get the order the little boy said, “You know Mommy, that man thinks I’m real.”

3 There is nothing more affirming than being heard. It is what gives one reality, a sense of who one is. There is nothing more painful than not being heard, not being understood, especially when one is trying to express ones deep feelings or hurts or needs. Just imagine saying to somebody, “I am going in now to see the results of my tests. The doctor thinks I may have cancer,” and the other persons replies, “I hope the corner shop is open, I would like to buy cigarettes.”

4 John Main used to make the point that one of the great sufferings of Jesus was that people did not hear his great love for them. For example, at the Last Supper he was trying to share his love and the fear of his impending death with the disciples. But, they were more concerned about who would be in the highest places in the Kingdom.

5 If we look at the forms of apostolate that seem to be effective today, we will find that the key factor in them all is Listening. There are now over 200 programs based on the insights of the Alcoholics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, Women Hurt by Abortion, etc. One of the principal dynamics in all of these is being listened to by another so-called weak person who is not threatening. Likewise, listening is fundamental to Clinical Pastoral Education, Marriage Encounter, the Spiritual Exercise of St Ignatius and any form of Pastoral Counseling or Spiritual Direction.

6 If one is to be effective in ministry, the first requirement is positive regard and love for the people with whom one works. There is no better way of affirming people and showing that love and positive regard than by listening to them and showing that you have heard. A very frequent reason for our failure as pastors is that we fail to communicate our love to our people. One of the ways of doing this is to listen to them attentively. I once preached a sermon on “The saints I’ve met recently,” I mentioned some people in the parish that I had encountered , people looking after the old and the sick and bearing all sorts of burdens. I was amazed at the positive reaction to the sermon. People felt very affirmed, as if they were saying, “It is good to hear that you are hearing our lives.”

7 We cannot be at home with others and listening to them unless there is stillness within ourselves. If we are not quiet within ourselves our minds will be running off in different directions. We will cut off the other when any matter is touched with which we are not comfortable.

8 It is impossible for us to communicate well to people if we have not listened to them. Our message can only touch people when they can hear their own experience in it. Good

communication is to feed back in an organised way what people have said in a disorganised way. I have found that if I want to tune in to what is happening in the parish, it is very important to listen to everyone, but especially to those who are drunk or a little mentally unstable. They have less inhibitions and may give you the truth that you need to hear bluntly, if you have the ears to hear it.

9 Naturally, we cannot communicate the Lord to others, unless we have been listening to his message in his Word and in silence. As we continue to say the Mantra and put aside distraction, God's word is active within our depths. When we come to speak we will often be surprised where the wisdom comes from.

10 Priests and religious are notoriously bad listeners. People look to us as having the answers, as knowing it all. We tend to accept and internalize that image and so we imagine that we do not need to listen.

11 We have to be able to listen to another without distraction, without judgment or condemnation, without worrying about what our response will be, without being defensive, without intrusion by our Egos and our personal agendas, trusting that the Lord will give us the appropriate response when it is needed. In praying the Mantra we are learning to 'let go' of all that is the product of our own Ego. As we give our attention to the Mantra, listening to it sounding within ourselves, we also become more present to ourselves, to others and to God and more available to be his instruments.

29. Meditation And Work For Justice

1 Frightful injustice is a reality of our world. It needs great energy, indeed passion, to confront and fight injustice. Fighting for justice without a deep spirituality is as great a tragedy as those who claim to be spiritual and are not concerned with justice. Fighting for justice without spirituality has often led to burn-out, loss of religious vocation, and the taking up of arms.

2 To be committed to justice, we must first have heard our own pain at its depths. We must have learned to sit with our anger and to befriend our negative feelings. If not, these feelings will clutter up the doors of our hearts and minds, and make impossible, rational, just and consistent action. We must learn to be patient, to wait. It does not help anyone if we compound the present violence with another one.

3 Meditation, I believe, is the best preparation for work for justice. In the process of meditation, one hears the totality of oneself. One goes down through the layers of anger and hatred to the sense of justice and peace that is at the heart of Christ. One learns the patience and balance of Christ himself.

4 While Christ preached justice passionately, it was not his priority value. Mercy and compassion were. We too cannot preach justice if our hearts are not filled with compassion and mercy.

5 Where can we realistically begin to change the world except in ourselves. We must first align our passions and bring them to bear on the problems constructively. This may lead one to research, another to legal aid, another to organizing among the poor. Ultimately, it leads to a reverence not only for the sufferers but also for those who have been dehumanized into causing the suffering. It leads to the poverty of realizing that only the oppressed can free the oppressed and that all an outsider can do is to be in solidarity with them.

6 Meditation gives one the only weapon a disciple can have with which to deal with bullies. I have seen a number of times how people of violence cannot deal with the presence of a contemplative. We need contemplative presences, not armies, to stand up against violence.

7 This is the only power that we need or can use in the face of injustice and violence. And one key to it is in the twice daily saying of the mantra.

30. Death Leading To Resurrection

1 Death and birth are very closely related. Every birth is a death and every death is a birth. If the child in the womb were able, it would resist birth. It fears the cold outside world and does not want to enter into it. Every birth is, in a sense, premature. We are never ready for the cold world. We are never quite ready for the next stage. The child is never quite ready to go to school. Later, the same child is not ready to leave school and go into the competitive world. Getting married, too, or choosing a profession is a birth for which we are never fully prepared.

2 Each of these births is also a death. When a child is born, it dies to its past existence in the womb. When it goes to school, it dies to its security in the home. Life is a series of births and dyings.

3 There is always some pain in birth as there is in death. But the degree of pain depends on the clinging. If there is much clinging, if there is great resistance to “letting go”, the wrenching is greater.

4 The clinging does not necessarily indicate love. It is often easier to let go of the loved than the unloved. When the loved person or object is taken away, there is a vacuum but that can easily be filled again. But when the unloved person goes, there is a wrenching. Parts of our crushed ego are still entangled in that person or object. We may be dependent on persons and angry or afraid as they leave us. Generally, we do not mourn for the other person, we mourn mostly for ourselves. The lives of many persons are stunted by anger towards a parent who died young and failed to provide fully for them.

5 John Main used to call meditation the first death. It prepares us for the second death. If clinging is what makes death hard, then the twice daily practice of meditation is detaching us daily from everything – from words, thoughts, self-centredness, from the ego. As we meditate, we come to peace at our own centre and the forces within us become integrated.

6 In daily life, we go through little deaths which takes us through the five stages of dying enumerated by Dr Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. According to her, the first reaction to the possibility of death is denial. “It could not be me, there must be a mistake!” Then come anger. “How could God do this to me? The doctors and nurses are stupid.” Then, there is bargaining. “I’ll build a church if you will make me well.” The fourth stage is characterised by depression, and after that hopefully we come to the final stage of acceptance.

7 The discipline of the mantra during life exercises our ability to let go as we experience our little deaths in daily life. The little deaths may be our failures, or the realisation of our own sinfulness or limitations. We go through the five stages of dying in coping with these. If we have been doing this, we will be better prepared to let go to the final one, death itself.

8 The practice of meditation prepares us for death and dying in another way. One of the fears of the aging is that their lives will no longer be useful and that they will have nothing worthwhile to contribute. If during ones active days, one has come to appreciate meditation and make it, as John Main did, “The axis on which my day was built,” then one learns to look forward to old age for the leisure it will allow one for ones most valued and favoured activity.

9 Each time we meditate, we enter into the passion of Jesus. As he handed himself and all that he was into the hands of the Father, so do we every time we leave self behind and say our mantra. As the Father accepted the oblation of Christ and restored him to life, we too are led in our meditation to a new fullness of life, to Resurrection.

10 We fear goodbye's. But if we are sure of Christ's risen presence, his indwelling presence, then there is no leaving. There is nothing to fear because there is no goodbye.